

17. CONSERVATION AWARENESS

“Come forth into the light of things. Let nature be your teacher.”²⁹

The Fort Richardson natural resources program adheres to the principle of using professional, sound practices to produce user benefits and resource protection within the parameters of the military mission. Conservation awareness is instrumental in creating conditions needed to conduct effective natural resources management. USARAK’s approach to awareness stresses education. It provides military personnel and the public with insights into Fort Richardson’s natural environment and conservation challenges. Natural resource managers are convinced that the more people know about the post’s unique natural resources, the more responsibly they will act toward them.

Education also promotes awareness of critical environmental projects and the rationale behind them. Activities such as stocking fish, controlling erosion, suppressing wildfire, etc. can be accomplished with little conservation awareness effort since soldiers, recreationists, and the general public naturally support these easily understood efforts. Issues such as reduced grounds maintenance, restrictions on troop field operations, nongame management, pesticide use, etc. require effective conservation communication to gain positive support and, perhaps more importantly, to avoid adverse reactions from various users. Other programs, such as permit fees or access controls may be favored by the installation’s decision makers, but they can be controversial to outside interested parties. A conservation awareness program must be directed to both internal and external interests if it is to be effective.

17-1 Objectives

- Provide an understanding of the Fort Richardson natural resources program to the military and surrounding communities

- Provide decision makers with information needed to make sound judgments which affect the Fort Richardson natural resources program
- Provide general conservation education to the Fort Richardson community
- Enhance professional skills of the Fort Richardson natural resources staff

17-2 Printed Media

The installation’s weekly newspaper, the *Arctic Post*, is the most efficient way for USARAK personnel to access the Fort Richardson community. The *Arctic Post* is used by Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely as well as Fort Richardson. This newspaper is used to explain programs and gain support for their implementation. Articles target a wide range of readers, but may be designed to appeal to specific categories of readers. The *Arctic Post* commonly uses photographs when covering natural resources issues, thereby providing an easily understood form of communication. Natural resources articles appearing in this publication are written by USARAK Natural Resources personnel or the paper’s regular staff writers. These articles feature topics relating to major natural resource projects and other aspects of management that may have public appeal. Recent topics have included Arbor Day tree planting, bear safety, moose studies, and updates on the ERF waterfowl project. Items of ongoing interests need to be recycled about every third year. In this way, the transient population of Fort Richardson remains apprised of the most important and sensitive natural resources management challenges at Fort Richardson.

²⁹William Wordsworth

Other newspapers occasionally solicit information about Fort Richardson's natural resources programs. News releases and interviews with outside media are coordinated with Fort Richardson's Public Affairs Office (PAO). Two area newspapers, the *Anchorage Daily News* and the *Chugiak-Eagle River Star*, regularly publish stories related to post natural resources. Letters to the editor are a common place for items dealing with post natural resources issues. Often, articles in the *Anchorage Daily News* lead to responses from readers in the letters section. Such has been the case with Eagle River rafting, raven research, and urban moose problems. These letters, in particular, tend to be critical of installation policies or actions.

When dealing with private newspapers, it is important to recognize that the audience may not appreciate the military mission or community. Whenever possible, points should reflect positively on Fort Richardson and be made in a clear and noncontroversial manner.

In 1998–2003, special efforts will be made to use newspapers to acquaint the Fort Richardson–Anchorage community with the concepts of ecosystem management. These efforts will focus on issues such as neotropical birds, native ecosystem protection, moose management, old growth forests, ERF cleanup, and similar concepts.

17-3 Television and Radio

In general, Fort Richardson's natural resources program is seldom the subject of television or radio coverage, but specific issues occasionally can, and do, attract their interest. In recent years, such topics have included ERF clean up operations, Eagle River rafting activities, and translocation of grizzly bears using Army helicopters.

17-4 Special Events

Special events that have local, state, or national significance present opportunities for educating the public on programs of high interest. Earth Day and Arbor Day (which often are celebrated on the same day) are good examples. Section 14-13a(3) describes efforts to maintain Fort Richardson's designation as Tree City, USA.

17-5 Wildlife Museum and Other Interpretative Facilities

Fort Richardson's Wildlife Museum is operated by the Military Police Game Warden section. MPs conduct guided tours of the facility for school and community groups, provide information on Fort Richardson recreational opportunities (fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, ORV use, skiing, etc.), advise individuals of pertinent laws and regulations, and issue required recreational permits.

In 1998–2003, a display guide will be developed to allow the public to better understand museum displays through self-guided tours. There also will be a project developed to restore or replace some mounted specimens that have lost their "lifelike" appearance. This project may involve volunteer work if persons with the appropriate skills can be located. Their restoration work could be acknowledged via labels on the back of mounts.

CRREL recently produced a 20-minute video (using Fort Richardson personnel for script and video) that explains the history of the ERF pollution issue. There are plans to produce a follow-up video showing remediation implementation. This follow-up video should be completed in 1998 or 1999.

During 1998–2003, there will be a major emphasis on the development of interpretative facilities at various locations visited by the public. Interpretative signs will be installed at places such as Gwen Lake, Clunie Lake, and Otter Lake. Volunteer groups will assist with the development of these interpretative facilities, as well as more general improvements (including shoreline restoration and viewing shelter repairs) to these outdoor recreation facilities.

Wildlife viewing potential exists at McVeigh Marsh, and a nature trail and viewing platform are being investigated.

17-6 Watchable Wildlife

The Watchable Wildlife program is very important at Fort Richardson. Thirteen agencies (including USARAK) and nongovernmental organizations produced the *Alaska Wildlife Viewing Guide* (Sydeman

and Lund, 1996). Fort Richardson is included (Site 32) in this viewing guide as a premier watchable wildlife viewing area.

The Watchable Wildlife program is more than a booklet; it is a philosophy of bringing wildlife and conservation ethics to the public. Many Fort Richardson programs described in this section are part of the post's Watchable Wildlife philosophy.



Fort Richardson offers wonderful opportunities to see and experience wildlife.

In 1996, Legacy project funds were used to develop a brochure specifically designed for wildlife viewing throughout Alaska. This brochure complements the ADF&G *Watchable Wildlife* booklet.

USARAK will develop a Watchable Wildlife Action Plan for inclusion into this INRMP (at Appendix 1). Appendix 1 contains a description of the plan, its compliance authorities, and budget priority.

17-7 Youth Groups

USARAK is committed to cultivating a conservation ethic in local youth. Natural Resources Branch personnel work with youth groups on wildlife/natural resource conservation programs. The Wildlife Museum often hosts tours by local school groups. On occasion, USARAK Natural Resources personnel also give talks to schools and youth groups on wildlife and natural resource topics.

Boy Scouts, in particular, need support with projects, merit badges, and conservation talks. On Fort Richardson, scouts have assisted with natural resources management. One Eagle Scout project involved



Scouts are among the youth groups that participate in Fort Richardson natural resource activities.

building platforms for signs to inform boaters about the need to stay away from loon-nesting areas.

In 1998–2003, USARAK personnel will continue to work with youth groups whenever possible. This is a good investment in the future. One project, in particular, that is ideal for such groups is helping with a Watchable Wildlife trail near Otter Lake.

17-8 Professional Communication

The Wildlife Society, the Society of American Foresters, the American Society of Agronomy, the National Military Fish and Wildlife Association, the Society for Ecological Restoration, and the Society for Conservation Biology are among those professional organizations helpful in meeting the needs of USARAK's natural resources managers. Membership in these societies is encouraged. They have some of the best scientific publications in their professions, and literature review is a necessary commitment to maintain standards. Attending the meetings of these societies also provides excellent opportunities to communicate with fellow professionals, as well as maintain professional standards.

Other opportunities to communicate with professionals and maintain standards will be used regularly by Natural Resources Branch personnel. The annual meeting and training workshop of the National Military Fish and Wildlife Association is perhaps the best single opportunity each year for USARAK professionals to learn from and teach others. This meeting includes DOD and U.S. Army breakout sessions. The LRAM Workshop has be-

come the best overall annual ITAM meeting. The North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference provides the best opportunities overall to deal with national issues and priorities.

Specialized meetings include furbearer and predator symposia (especially those concerning northern species), LCTA workshops, law enforcement seminars, and similar educational events. Attendance at these meetings is advantageous for enhancing professional skills.

USARAK has been instrumental in organizing various meetings, including the 1994 National Military Fish and Wildlife Association meeting. This involvement will continue.

17-9 Summary

Fort Richardson's natural resources program is relatively noncontroversial and enjoys an excellent reputation, locally and statewide. This is due, in large part, to Fort Richardson's awareness programs which interact with a wide variety of governmental and private organizations, as well as private individuals. Many organizations and individuals outside of Fort Richardson are important to the post's natural resources program.